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## Let's talk about sexting, baby: Computer-mediated sexual behaviors among young adults

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## ABSTRACT

Although much media attention has been directed towards sexting (transmission of sexual material via phone or internet), little empirical work exists on the topic. Moreover, the few studies that do exist have been inconsistent in their definition of sexting and measures of sexting behavior, which makes comparisons between these studies difficult. In this study, we provide a granular, descriptive analysis of sexting behavior within a cohort of young adults, focusing on the content of sex messages, the medium used to transmit these messages, and the relationship context in which these transmissions occur. We found that sexting was fairly common across all types of romantic relationships (committed, casual sex, and cheating), text messaging was the primary medium used to send sex pictures and videos, and the prevalence, motivations, and risks associated with sexting varied by relationship context. Considering the complexity and diversity of sexting practices within this cohort, we suggest that those studying sexting and implementing initiatives with young adults use more detailed (rather than general) definitions and questions of sexting behavior, and that they delineate between these different types of content, transmission media, and relationship contexts.

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## 1. Introduction

During the past decade, methods of social communication have changed considerably, especially among young adults (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010; Smith, 2011). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) now dominates the social landscape, and among young adults, texting and social networking prevail. Recent statistics show that young adults use text messaging much more often than voice calls (Smith, 2011), and most (approximately 80%) use a social networking service (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), often several times a day (Hampton et al., 2011). A number of researchers have begun to examine the use of these technologies within different relationship contexts (e.g., Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012), and recent research has focused on the use of these technologies within romantic relationships (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Elphinstone & Noller, 2011; Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Within this body of research, one of the areas that has attracted much attention from media sources, school administrators, and legal authorities is the use of computer-mediated communication for transmitting sexual material (CMC-S), or “sexting”.

Few empirical studies have examined sexting, but those that have, have been rather inconsistent in the way they have defined sexting (Lounsbury, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2011). More specifically, there have been inconsistencies in the ways in which researchers have defined: (1) the *content* of messages, (2) the *medium* used to send messages, and (3) the *relationship context* within which these messages have been sent. In a recent study, Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, and Wolak (2012) helped to elucidate some of these issues using a large-scale telephone survey with children and teens (aged 10–17). Primarily, this research addressed issues that would be relevant from a legal standpoint; however, it also provided valuable information about the nature of sexting in this age group. Interestingly, despite the growing number of empirical studies with young adult samples (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Ferguson, 2011; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011) and the fact that this group is the heaviest users of texting and cell phones (Ling, 2010; Smith, 2011), researchers have yet to clearly define ‘sexting’ among young adults. However, sexting among adults merits detailed study, as according to Weiss and Samenow (2010), there has been an increase in the number of people seeking treatment for problematic online sexual behaviors. Consequently, there is a need to examine empirically the role of technology in sexuality in this group (Weiss & Samenow, 2010). Thus, the goal of the present study was to disentangle these different aspects of sexting to provide a more detailed descriptive analysis of the sexting practices of young adults. This analysis is meant to serve as a baseline for researchers

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and practitioners in their development of sexting studies and initiatives with young adults.

### 1.1. Content of CMC-S

At present, the greatest inconsistency in the limited sexting literature concerns the definition of the *content* of sex messages. In one of the most widely-cited, seminal studies, Lenhart (2009) defined sexting as sending “sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos or videos of yourself” (p. 16). This was similar to the definition provided in the Sex and Tech Survey (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008) of sending a “nude or semi-nude picture/video (of yourself)” (p. 11); however, the Sex and Tech Survey also included questions about sending “sexually suggestive material,” which could include non-picture sex messages. Another widely-cited study conducted by the Associated Press and MTV (2009) used both specific and general definitions, referring to sexting as either sharing a “naked photo or video” (p. 2) or “messages with sexual words or images by text or on the internet” (p. 2). More recently, Drouin and Landgraff (2012) used general definitions that differentiated “sexually explicit text messages” from “sexually explicit picture and video messages” (p. 446) and Ferguson (2011) defined sexting as sending “erotic or nude photographs” (p. 240). Meanwhile, Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) combined these various definitions, referring to sexting as “sending or receiving sexually-laden text messages, sexually suggestive photos or videos, or partially nude or nude photos or videos via cell phone” (p. 1698), but also asked four separate questions about content: (1) sexually suggestive photo or video, (2) photo or video in underwear or lingerie, (3) nude photo or video, and (4) sexually suggestive text. Unfortunately, this inconsistency in terminology makes comparability between previous studies almost impossible (Lounsbury et al., 2011). Moreover, it creates the need for research with young adults that delineates these different types of sexual content to determine whether the prevalence statistics vary by content. This will help researchers determine whether the definition of sexting needs to be broadened or limited and will also give some guidance on the interpretation of previous findings.

### 1.2. Medium used for CMC-S

Another inconsistency relates to the medium the person uses to transmit the sexual information. Some researchers have asked participants about their sending of sex messages over cell phones specifically (Lenhart, 2009; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011), whereas others did not limit their questions about sexting to cell phones only (Associated Press & MTV, 2009; Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). Drouin and Landgraff (2012) and Ferguson (2011) did not specify a context, and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) and Associated Press and MTV (2009) asked questions about sex messages sent either by cell phone or the internet, but they did not delineate these two media types in their analyses. This is a potentially serious methodological issue because, as Lounsbury et al. (2011) suggest, cell phones are not the only medium through which sexually explicit material could be shared. In fact, prominent media sources gave great attention to a recent scandal involving a US congressman who sent sexually suggestive photos online via Twitter and Facebook (Canning & Hopper, 2011), which suggests that social networking sites are also being used to transmit sexual content. Therefore, a logical next step in this area of research is to determine the prevalence with which sexting occurs within different types of media (e.g., texting, Facebook, Twitter, email) so that researchers will have a guide for developing relevant sexting medium questions. This has already

been done with a child sample (Mitchell et al., 2012); these researchers found that text messaging was the most popular way to send photos of oneself, while instant messaging and social networking sites were used quite rarely to transmit sexual images. In our young adult sample, we expected similar trends, based on extremely high usage statistics for text messaging among young adults (Smith, 2011) as well as previous research that limited sexting questions to cell phones only but still found a fairly high incidence of sex messages (Lenhart, 2009; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011).

### 1.3. Relationship contexts for CMC-S: Motivations, risks, and prevalence

Finally, there is also much inconsistency surrounding the relationship context in which the sexting interactions occur. Some researchers have presented prevalence statistics for different types of relationships, such as ‘significant others’, ‘romantic interests’, and people whom are known only in an online forum (Associated Press & MTV, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). However, the more recent studies on the topic (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Ferguson, 2011; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011) did not differentiate between these various relationship types in their analyses. Although two of these studies examined attachment variables related to sexting, Drouin and Landgraff (2012) focused only on committed relationships, whereas Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) did not have participants specify a relationship context. According to the limited data presented on this topic in earlier survey studies (Associated Press & MTV, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008) and the recent, more comprehensive study with children (Mitchell et al., 2012), relationship type may influence both prevalence and motivations for sexting. Consequently, researchers moving forward in this field should consider differences in sexting practices within the vast array of relationship types that exist in the population being studied.

In terms of the relationship types that are common among college students, recent studies have shown that committed relationships are still very popular; in fact, approximately 85% of Drouin and Landgraff’s (2012) sample reported having had one. They also showed that sexting is a popular means of sexual communication within these committed relationships: the majority of participants had sent sexually explicit texts (67%) or sexually explicit pictures or videos (54%) to their committed partners (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012). However, casual sexual relationships are also common among college students (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Regan & Dreyer, 1999), as are cheating relationships (Grello et al., 2006). Approximately half of the sexually active college students in the Grello et al. (2006) and Regan and Dreyer (1999) samples had engaged in casual sex, and one-fifth of those who engaged in casual sex relationships had another romantic partner at the time of the encounter (Grello et al., 2006). Although sexting could provide an arena for initiating or sustaining sexual contact for casual sexual relationships, there is no known research that has examined the prevalence or motivations for sexting within this context. Presumably, there are different motivations and risks associated with sexting within different relationship contexts. For example, college students in committed relationships might engage in sexting to sustain intimacy with long-term partners who are physically absent (in military or at another university), whereas those in casual sex relationships—where the relationship is based on sex—might engage in sexting to initiate sex. Additionally, some key features of committed relationships—trust and intimacy—are often absent in casual sex or cheating relationships, which makes them somewhat ‘riskier’ in terms of the possibility that sex messages will be forwarded. Therefore, examining the prevalence, motivations, and risks associated with sexting in different relationship contexts

(committed, casual sexual, and cheating) may give us a more detailed picture of the sexting practices of young adults.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 253 college students (105 men and 148 women) from a medium-sized university in the Midwestern United States. Participants were recruited from introductory psychology classes in Fall, 2011 and received a research credit for participation. From a larger sample ( $N = 270$ ), only the young adult participants (aged 18–26) were retained. The average age of the participants was 19.47 years ( $SD = 1.54$ ). Participants were largely Caucasian (79% White (Non-Hispanic); 8% Hispanic; 6% African American; 3% Asian; and 4% Biracial or other ethnicity) and unmarried (5% married, 2% divorced or separated). They were mostly freshmen (75% freshmen, 17% sophomores, 4% juniors, and 4% seniors) and reported various major fields of study (more than 42 different majors were represented). For those who indicated they were in a relationship at the time of the study ( $n = 151$ ), 95% indicated that the relationship was heterosexual.

### 2.2. Procedure

All participants completed online consent forms and were then given access to an online anonymous survey. The survey contained general demographic questions, as well as specific questions about sexting, presented separately within the three relationship contexts of interest (committed, casual sex, and cheating), as defined below.

#### 2.2.1. Relationship context definitions

At the beginning of each relationship subsection, participants were asked if they had ever been involved in that type of romantic relationship (i.e., committed, casual sex, or cheating). Only those who indicated they had been involved in that type of relationship answered the sexting questions in that subsection. For *committed relationships*, participants were asked to “think about your most significant (either current or past) committed relationship. This would be a person with whom you shared an intimate relationship, like a serious boyfriend or girlfriend, and would NOT be just a casual fling or person with whom you were involved only sexually”. For the section on *casual sexual relationships*, participants were asked to “think about your most significant casual sexual relationship (e.g., a casual fling or a hookup and NOT a boyfriend/girlfriend). This may be a person with whom you shared just a few sexual encounters or one with whom you shared many sexual encounters. In any case, you did not have a committed relationship with this person”. And finally, for the section on *cheating relationships*, participants were asked to “think about a person with whom you have cheated (i.e., the other man or woman). This could be a person with whom you had a casual sexual fling or a person with whom you had a long-standing relationship. In either case, this relationship was *outside* your committed romantic relationship”. Participants were asked a number of directed questions about the frequency, content, medium used, and motivations and risks related to their computer-mediated sexual communication (CMC-S) within each of the relationship subsections, as detailed below.

#### 2.2.2. Prevalence of sexting

Participants were asked to report the frequency with which they engaged in different types of CMC-S with that romantic partner. Specifically, they were asked to indicate how often they (1) sent sex texts, (2) sent sex pictures or videos, (3) had phone sex,

and (4) had live video sex (e.g., Skype sex) with their romantic partner (6-point Likert scales from 1 = *never* to 6 = *very frequently*). Prevalence statistics were determined by calculating how many participants had engaged in these types of CMC-S more than *never*.

#### 2.2.3. Content of picture or video messages

Participants were asked to indicate whether the content of their picture or video messages ever contained the following types of images: nude, nearly nude, engaged in a sex act with another person, engaged in a solo sex act (e.g., masturbation), or in a sexually suggestive pose (e.g., cleavage showing), but clothed. Participants were instructed to select all content types that had ever been sent to a romantic partner in that relationship category.

#### 2.2.4. Medium used to send sex messages

Participants were asked to indicate how often they used different media (e.g., text, email, Facebook, Twitter) to send sex pictures or videos to relationship partners. Again, participants indicated frequency on 6-point Likert scales from 1 = *never* to 6 = *very frequently*.

#### 2.2.5. Motivations for sending sex messages

Participants were asked to indicate their “usual motivation” for exchanging sex pictures or videos via all media types. Sex pictures and videos were the focus of this question (as opposed to sex texts) because this type of message has been highlighted in past research and media reports. Participants could select from one of seven options provided in the survey (e.g., flirtation or partner was away) or type in their own answer.

#### 2.2.6. Risks associated with sending sex messages

Participants were asked how often they feared their romantic partner would forward their sex picture or video message and were also asked how often they did forward a sex picture or video message sent to them by their partner. Both questions used a Likert scale from 1 = *never* to 6 = *very frequently*.

## 3. Results

To provide a more detailed description of sexting among young adult college students, we recorded the frequency with which participants reported engaging in different types of computer-mediated sexual communication. All of these CMC-S data were collected within the context of specific types of relationships (committed, casual sex, or cheating); thus, the descriptive analyses that follow are presented within this context.

### 3.1. Descriptive analysis of content of CMC-S

Our first aim was to provide a more cohesive picture of the nature of CMC-S among young adults. To do this, we examined data from two different measures, one which measured the frequency of engagement in different types of CMC-S (sex texts, sex pictures, phone sex, and live video sex) and one which measured the specific content of sex picture and video messages. With regard to the frequency of CMC-S, Table 1 shows that sexting was fairly common across all relationship types; 55–78% of individuals had sent sex texts and 37–49% had sent sex pictures or videos to romantic partners. Additionally, overall, sexting was more prevalent than either phone sex or live video sex.

In terms of the content of picture and video messages, two statistics are relevant: the percentage of those who had sent that type of content who had *ever sent a sex picture or video message to a partner* (Fig. 1), and the percentage of those who had sent that type of content who had *ever had that type of relationship* (Fig. 2). These

**Table 1**

Percentage of those who had ever engaged in computer-mediated sexual communication with different types of relationship partners.

	Committed partner (%)	Casual sex partner (%)	Cheating partner (%)
Text (no pictures or video)	78	63	55
Pictures or video	49	37	45
Phone sex	46	34	36
Live video (e.g., Skype) sex	12	8	8

Note. Committed partner  $n = 201$ ; casual sex partner  $n = 123$ ; cheating partner  $n = 53$ . In each case,  $n$  represents the number of people who had ever had that type of relationship partner.

### 3.2. Descriptive analysis of medium for CMC-S

In terms of the medium used to transmit sex messages, in relation to other types of CMC (i.e., social networking and email), text messaging was by far the most popular medium for sending sexual pictures or videos (see Table 2). Approximately one third to one half of the young adults in this sample reported sending a sex picture or video via text message. Comparatively few sent sex pictures or videos via Facebook, Twitter, or email.

### 3.3. Descriptive analysis of relationship context for CMC-S

In this sample, 201 individuals (79%) indicated that they had had a committed relationship, 123 (49%) indicated that they had had a casual sexual relationship, and 53 (21%) indicated that they had had a cheating relationship. With regard to differences in prevalence of CMC-S across the relationship types, Table 1 shows that a greater percentage of people had engaged in CMC-S of all types with committed partners than with casual sex or cheating partners. However, in some cases (e.g., sending sex pictures or videos), these differences were not great. The largest differences were found with sending sex texts and having phone sex; more of those with committed relationships reported having engaged in these types of CMC-S than those in casual sex or cheating relationships. In terms of the type of content of these messages, Fig. 1 shows that there was some variability across relationship type (e.g., committed partners were more likely to send nearly nude pictures/videos whereas casual sex partners were more likely to send nude pictures/videos), but overall there was much similarity across relationship types in terms of sexual content in sex pictures or videos. With regard to the medium used to transmit messages, Table 2 shows that those in casual sex relationships, especially cheating relationships, were more likely than those in committed relationships to use CMC methods other than text message (i.e., email or Facebook messages) to transmit sex pictures and videos; however, their use of these other methods was still quite low in comparison to text messages.

With regard to motivations for sending sex messages, participants reported many different “usual motivations” for sending sex pictures and videos to relationship partners, and these varied somewhat across relationship type. Overall, the most cited reasons for sending sex picture or video messages were for flirtation, because their partner asked them to send it, and to initiate sex (see Table 3). These were fairly consistent across relationship type. However, there were also some notable differences. For example, for those in committed relationships, a large proportion (approximately one in four) sent these messages because their partners were far away; however, very few in the other relationship types cited this motivation. Meanwhile, about one in four of those in a cheating relationship sent sex messages because they were bored or wanted covert communication, but those in the other relationship types rarely cited these motivations.

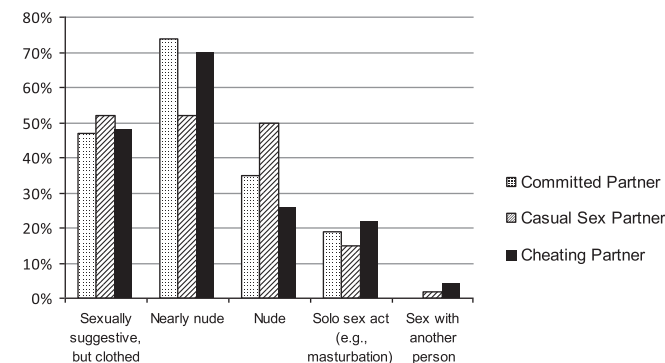
Finally, with regard to risks associated with sending sex messages, we examined the risk (perceived and real) of the picture

**Table 2**

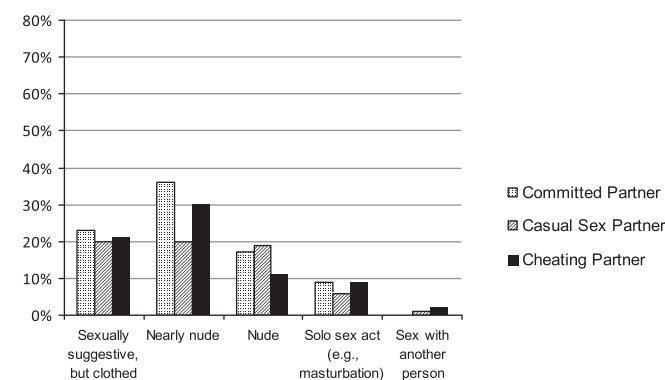
Percentage of those who had ever sent sex pictures or videos to romantic partners via text, Facebook, Twitter, or email.

	Committed partner (%)	Casual sex partner (%)	Cheating partner (%)
Text	50	38	45
Facebook	3	4	8
Twitter	1	2	4
Email	5	7	11

Note. Committed partner  $n = 201$ ; casual sex partner  $n = 123$ ; cheating partner  $n = 53$ . In each case,  $n$  represents the number of people who had ever had that type of relationship partner.



**Fig. 1.** Percentage of those who had ever sent a sex video or picture message to that type of romantic partner who sent the following types of content. Committed partner  $n = 97$ ; casual sex partner  $n = 46$ ; cheating partner  $n = 23$ . As this was a multiple response data set, total percentages sometimes exceed 100%.



**Fig. 2.** Percentage of those who had ever had that type of romantic partner who had sent that romantic partner the following types of content. Committed partner  $n = 201$ ; casual sex partner  $n = 123$ ; cheating partner  $n = 53$ .

figures show the popularity of the content type among those who send sex pictures and videos to partners and among individuals in romantic relationships, respectively. Both figures show that participants were most likely to have sent pictures or videos of themselves nearly nude, and overall, they were less likely to send fully nude pictures than ones in which they wore at least some clothing. However, more explicit content was also common. As Fig. 2 shows, approximately one in five people who had been in a committed relationship or a casual sexual relationship had sent an entirely nude picture or video to their partner. Further, as Fig. 2 shows, about one in ten people who had been in a committed or cheating relationship had sent a picture or video of themselves masturbating to a partner.



**Table 3**

Participants' usual motivations for sending sexual pictures or videos to different types of relationship partners.

	Committed partner (%)	Casual sex partner (%)	Cheating partner (%)
Flirtation	27	19	33
Partner asked me to	23	38	13
Shy to say/do face-to-face	2	2	0
Wanted to initiate sex	15	26	29
Wanted covert comm.	0	0	13
Boredom	2	6	13
Partner was far away	26	4	0
Other	5	4	0

Note. Committed partner  $n = 99$ ; casual sex partner  $n = 47$ ; cheating partner  $n = 24$ . In each case,  $n$  represents the number of people who had indicated that they had sent sexually explicit pictures to that type of relationship partner more than "never."

**Table 4**

Percentage of those who feared their romantic partner would forward the picture or video and those who actually did forward the picture or video.

	Committed partner (%)	Casual sex partner	Cheating partner (%)
Feared forwarding	26	53	46
Did forward	3	15	21

Note. Committed partner  $n = 99$  for "feared forwarding",  $n = 100$  for "did forward"; casual sex partner  $n = 47$  for "feared forwarding",  $n = 61$  for "did forward"; cheating partner  $n = 24$  for "feared forwarding",  $n = 29$  for "did forward". In each case,  $n$  represents the number of people who had indicated that they had sent sexually explicit pictures more than never.

or video being forwarded by different types of relationship partners. Table 4 shows that those in casual sex and cheating relationships were twice as likely to fear their pictures or videos being forwarded as those in committed relationships. In terms of the real risk of forwarding, those in casual sex relationships were five times as likely, and those in cheating relationships were seven times as likely, as those in committed relationships to forward the pictures their partners sent them.

#### 4. Discussions

In this study, we conducted a granular analysis of sexting among young adults to develop a more cohesive picture of sexting practices in this population. Our descriptive analyses focused on the content of CMC-S, the medium used to transmit CMC-S, and the relationship contexts in which these transmissions occurred. Similar analyses have been done recently with youth samples (Mitchell et al., 2012) to help resolve some of the methodological issues that have arisen in the early sexting research (Lounsbury et al., 2011).

In terms of content, we found that sending sex texts (words only) was the most popular form of CMC-S. Fewer of our young adults reported sending sex pictures or videos or engaging in phone sex, and only a very small percentage had engaged in live (e.g., Skype) sex. That said, one third to one half of the sample had sent a sex picture or video message to a relationship partner. Overall, the content of these messages tended to be less explicit (e.g., nearly nude) than more explicit (e.g., nude or masturbating); however, a fair number of young adults had sent pictures of themselves nude (about one in five) or masturbating (about one in ten) to relationship partners. Although the prevalence rates are much higher than those found in youth samples (Mitchell et al., 2012), the trends are somewhat similar in that more people reported sending sexual content that was less explicit. With regard

to a definition of sexting, it is apparent that "nude or nearly nude" does not cover the scope of sexual content that is being transmitted to relationship partners. Also, although this was not the focus of the present study, there are likely to be differences between people and relationships where less explicit content (e.g., clothed, but suggestive) is being exchanged versus those in which more explicit content (e.g., nude or masturbating) is being exchanged. Thus, the present findings, as well as those from Mitchell et al. (2012), suggest that more detailed, delineated definitions of sexting content, as opposed to general definitions (e.g., "sexually suggestive") would be more appropriate for measures of sexting in future studies.

With regard to the medium used to transmit messages, the trends were very clear; young adults used text messaging much more than any other CMC device to transmit messages of a sexual nature. This corresponds nicely with Mitchell et al. (2012), who found the same trends in youth samples. However, even though text messaging is the primary method used to transmit sex pictures and videos, it is not the only method; hence, future definitions and research questions involving sexting should not be limited to text messaging only. Moreover, future research might examine more closely, and with larger samples, the ways in which relationship status affects the medium used to transmit sex messages. For example, our research suggests that sexual communication that needs to be more covert (e.g., in cheating relationships) may be more likely to occur via email and social networking (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) messages than sexual communication that is more open (e.g., in committed relationships). This gives context to the recent media reports of a cheating scandal over Twitter (Canning & Hopper, 2011) and also suggests that future research into the issue of covert sexual communication is warranted.

Finally, one of the distinct lines of inquiry in the present research was examining the prevalence, motivations, and risks of sexting in different types of romantic relationships. Drouin and Landgraaf (2012) suggested that sexting needed to be examined within different relationship contexts, as their analyses focused only on committed relationships, and some other researchers did not specify a relationship context (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Our analyses showed that the prevalence of CMC-S of all types was highest in committed relationships; thus, examining these behaviors within committed relationships will likely produce the largest sample of those engaging in CMC-S. However, the motivations for sending sex pictures or videos in different relationship contexts (committed, casual sex, and cheating) were somewhat different, and the risks (perceived and actual) associated with sending sex pictures or videos to different types of romantic partners were very different. Consequently, researchers examining the personality or relationship characteristics that are associated with sexting behaviors may wish to have participants specify the relationship context in which the CMC-S occurs. These relationship contexts should also be at the forefront of focus group discussions and initiatives with youth and young adults, with special attention being drawn to the real and perceived risks of sexting in these different types of romantic relationships.

#### 4.1. Limitations and conclusion

As with any study, ours does have limitations. Most notably, our study focused on a sample of undergraduates in the United States. This sample is, by no means, representative of all American young adults; however, because the study was exploratory, with the goal of exploring the diversity and complexity of sexting practices within a cohort of young adults, our analysis suggests that sexting among young American adults is at least as complex as what was shown here. Therefore, those who are interested in studying this issue further, with more diverse samples (non-college young

adults and even in older adults, as suggested recently by Wiederhold (2011), should expand their definitions of sexting at least as much as what has been done here and in Mitchell et al. (2012). An additional limitation is that our inquiries into the nature of sexting reflect only the little empirical work that has been done on the topic thus far. Hence, this study does not provide an exhaustive view or definition of the sexting practices of today's young adults; instead, it provides a snapshot of CMC-S within this age group, guided by the empirical findings to date. As technologies change and emerge, the definition of sexting and major questions relevant to CMC-S will likely need to be revisited.

Despite these limitations, our study provides a much-needed framework for the examination of sexting among young adults. Our descriptive analyses suggest that sexting researchers should include more detailed questions about content, medium, and relationship context in their studies in order to capture the full-scope of motivations and risks associated with sexting behaviors. Moreover, as the first to delineate each of these sexting characteristics in a young adult sample, our study provides a more detailed picture of the sexting behaviors of today's young adults.

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